

An entrepreneur's guide to going digital

| By xneelo & Heavy Chef



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Foreword

In the past few years, the online industry has been rapidly growing at a sustainable rate - and welcomed new entrants with open arms.

Anyone with access to a computer and a good internet connection can truly seize new opportunities through online businesses. However, one thing that has continued to hang over the industry as a barrier to entry is the education and training necessary for people to really make a success of this new opportunity.

But that's where this e-book from xneelo and Heavy Chef comes in.

The e-book that you now have in front of you is a brilliant guide that will advance your understanding of how to lay a foundation for success and guide you through the actionable steps you can take to make it happen for yourself.

When I started my online business in 2010, I longed for a thorough resource like you have right now. I can say with complete certainty that I would have been able to grow my business into a multi-million rand business far quicker with this resource in hand. The learnings which I could only gain from trial and error are now outlined in a well thought-out process that will take you from idea to online in no time at all.

To make the most of this fantastic resource, set some time aside to read through it from top to bottom. Turn off your notifications, shut off other devices and ignore any distractions. This will be time well spent!

Wishing you success,



Warrick Kernes

Founder of the [*Insaka eCommerce Academy*](#)

Hello!

A strong digital presence is arguably one of the most important investments you'll make for your business. But if you're not that digitally savvy, it can be a tough journey to begin. That's why we've worked with Heavy Chef to bring you this short guide to getting your business online: six steps that will take you from idea to website and social media presence.

Being an entrepreneur can feel lonely, but we're here to share the journey with you. This guide has all the articles, expert tips and advice you need to get started.

Let's go!

Your xneelo team

www.xneelo.co.za





Chapter 1

Craft your brand

- How to make your idea digitally compelling
- Building your online brand (using the 3 Cs)
- Top tip: Andrew Smith, CEO and co-founder of Yuppiechef



How to make your idea digitally compelling

So you've got your business plan lined up. You know what your new business idea is going to be, how it's going to improve the world, and why now is the perfect time to launch it. You also know that you need to have a [website and an online presence](#).

But how do you make sure your new business idea is digitally compelling? The internet is a noisy place, and it's sometimes hard to stand out from the crowded marketplace. You can't shout louder than big brands because they have huge budgets for ads.

So what can you do? You can be smarter. More authentic. You can hustle.

5 questions to ask yourself about your idea

There are 5 questions you need to ask - and answer - about your online presence.

Take an hour or two out of your busy day to go on a thinking date. You can go to a coffee shop, go for a walk in nature, or even a long drive. Just make sure you take something to write on because you need to answer these 5 questions while you have the headspace.

1. What's your one-liner?

This isn't your elevator pitch, this is literally how to describe your business in one line. It needs to resonate with you because you will be splashing it all over the internet.

The more cohesive your online presence is - the same one-liner on your website, social media, emails, videos - the easier it will be for customers to understand what you do, and why to choose you.

2. What makes it unique?

How is this idea or business different from what's already out there? What are you offering that sets you apart? This could be the people you work with, the angle you're taking with your service, the product you're delivering or the customer service you offer.

3. How does it make my life easier?

This is all about your customer. How does your business or product make things easier, simpler, or more fun for them? What pain point are you addressing? Start with the customer's problem and how you're solving it - it's all about them.

4. Why should I tell my friends about it?

You'll know your idea is digitally compelling when people are talking about it offline. So what could make people talk about it in real life?

This will tie into your unique offering and how you make their lives easier, but it's a little something extra... Think of Yuppiechef's handwritten notes and what a game-changer that was at the time - "I ordered this pot and it came with a handwritten note and a little gift!" How could you come up with something talkable that relates directly to your business?

5. What's your secret ingredient?

This is more than what makes your business unique, it's what makes your heart sing.

Why did you choose this specific business idea, and how are you the right person to deliver it? That's your secret ingredient. Think of this as the petrol fueling the engine of your business: what keeps you driven, and moving forward.

Once you have the answers to these 5 questions, you'll have the ingredients you need to make your idea digitally compelling. Now it's time to combine them. Write down a paragraph (no more) that encompasses these 5 elements, and use it as your marketing material: on your website, your social media profiles, when describing your business in person or online. The same message repeated over and over has great power. The power of consistency, vision and purpose.



Building your online brand (using the 3 Cs)

Once you've got your website and social media [set up](#), what's next? Building your online brand.

Your brand encapsulates everything about your product or service. It's the thing itself, of course, but it's also the way you make people feel. The way you communicate with them. How you connect with them and what you add to their lives. If you want to build a powerful brand online, there are three things to remember.

The 3 Cs for online branding

The 3 Cs - Creativity, Caring and Consistency - are a simple way to check that you're looking at the big picture when it comes to online branding. Let's dive into each in a little more detail.

Creativity

There is something that you - and only you - have to say. Some specific niche that your brand fills. What is it? Why did you start your company and what is your USP (Unique Selling Point)? Once you know this, you'll know what you're uniquely qualified to share. Then you can build your content around this - whether it's a blog or website articles, social media updates, video or a podcast.

Think big: what problem can you solve for your customers, what do they need to hear from you (and only you) and what is the best way to communicate this message? Then think small: how can you start this online branding journey today?

Make it specific, and measurable. (At xneelo, we all love SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-based.)

Creativity is necessary to find the exact niche that you can fill online. You want it to be one that fills you with excitement and purpose. One that feels like you have something really relevant and helpful to add to the internet. Once you've tapped into that, let it shine through your brand.

Caring

We are all maxed out on information and products and services. The internet has brought us many blessings, but it's also brought us a lot of noise - much of which feels unnecessary.

How can you be caring towards your customers? How can you be mindful of their cognitive load and only give them relevant, helpful information?

Seeing customers as people (rather than just walking wallets) is helpful because it makes you consider their needs.

Think of ways that your brand can plug some of your customers' frustrations, and make their lives easier.

Consistency

And finally, be consistent. It might sound boring, but consistency is what builds a solid foundation for an online brand. If you post a brilliant article one week and then nothing for a few weeks, and then a fairly random article, you're not going to build a following.

Consistency is important not just in routine, but also in personality. Think about the foundational attributes of your brand, and stick to them. Let your customers know what to expect from your brand's personality - what kind of content you post, what niche you fill, and what problems you can help them to solve.

If you have a posting schedule that you stick to, and offer nuggets of wisdom or practical tips or helpful insights to your potential customers every week (or day!) at the same time, they will come to expect that from you. They'll come to depend on it.

Online branding sense check

The first step, naturally, is setting up a professional website. Your website should be [hosted by a reliable web hosting company](#) that helps you achieve your business goals. The next step is to write meaningful content that appeals to your customers, ensuring your SEO strategy is solid.

Keep in mind, at all times, that your customers are every bit as busy as you are, so what you offer should make their lives easier, and sweeter. After all, we're all in this together.



Andrew Smith

CEO and co-founder of [Yuppiechef](#)

“We built the Yuppiechef site to be something we wanted to use ourselves. How do we want to look for products? What information would we want on the product page? Trying to have empathy, trying to put ourselves in the shoes of a customer.

The website started pretty simple. Our philosophy was: let’s build momentum. Let’s get it live and then we can always adjust as we go. You don’t have to take a year to create the perfect product before you go live. Get it out there and then once it’s up and running, you can always make it better and better over time.”



Chapter 2

Build your website

- Your business website: a step-by-step guide
- Everything you need to know about web hosting (but never thought to ask)
- Top tip: Nkhesani Kapena, Chartered Accountant (ACCA), entrepreneur and director of 1.2.3. Consulting



Your business website: a step-by-step guide

Your online presence is your calling card to the world - but what if you haven't set it up yet? It can seem a little intimidating, starting from scratch. Never fear, you're not alone! We've laid out what you need to do, step-by-step.

1. Choose your domain name

Your [domain name](#) is the name of your website: what customers will type in or click on. Your domain name is often your customer's first interaction with your brand. If the domain name doesn't match your brand, or if a brand only has a Facebook page and not a website, it lacks credibility.

Your domain name will also be added to all your marketing material – online and offline. Choosing the right domain name is a long-term investment in your brand.

In an ideal world, your company name will be short, easy to spell and the domain name will be available. Sadly, that doesn't happen often. Finding the right domain name is a process that essentially involves finding a creative, on-brand representation of your business that will be simple to spell and easy to remember. No small task!

2. Choose your web host

Once you've found the right domain, it's time to choose your web host. A [web hosting company](#) provides the foundation on which your website is built. Hosting includes the storage your website uses, the traffic, email addresses and databases.

Building a website is one of the first steps of your online branding journey. It's also a fun - and useful - exercise in how you want to see your business represented online.

It's important to choose a web hosting company with solid infrastructure and reliable 24/7 support - they're the ones you call if something goes wrong with your website and you're not sure what to do. Having a hosting partner who is sensitive to your needs and always on hand ensures that you'll have the support you need on your business journey.

Security is another thing you want to check with your web hosting company. A secure website is essential to protect your business against hackers. Ideally, you want a hosting provider that provides:

- Spam filtering
- Blocking against unwanted traffic and DDoS attacks
- Integrated SSL to encrypt your user's information
- Firewalls and server security

Not sure how to choose a web hosting company? [HelloPeter](#) is always a good option, as are Google [reviews](#) as they give real customer feedback.

3. Choose your website platform

There are a number of CMS (Content Management Systems) to choose from - WordPress, Joomla and more. At xneelo, we prefer WordPress because it offers a lot of options to customise your site, and it's flexible - you can take your website with you wherever you go.

Another thing to consider is whether you want your website to be an e-commerce platform. If so, you'll either want to use an e-commerce-only solution like Shopify, or a plugin like WooCommerce that turns your WordPress site into a full-blown e-commerce store.

Once you've chosen your platform, you install it and you're ready to start building your site!

4. Customise your site

This is the fun part. You now have a blank website template to fill with your content and make your own. Before you begin, take some time to plan out your content. Think about your target market and how they will interact with your website - on mobile or desktop? Are they looking for something in particular - a number to call you, pricing information about your product, customer testimonials? How can you make their journey through your website as simple and straightforward as possible?

If you take the time to map out the user journey (the path you want visitors to take from when they land on your homepage to when they engage your services), your website will make a lot more sense.

When you're ready, you can [choose a theme](#) that suits your business, and start filling in the blanks.

Visual elements include:

- Your logo
- Images of your product or service
- Information about your team
- Perhaps images of your physical working space or store

Written elements include:

- Information about your company and your origins
- What you offer
- What makes you different
- Customer testimonials

Once you've got the basics down, you can start thinking about what kind of content you want to offer your visitors - how you want to use content marketing.

Content marketing is the process of creating authoritative, relevant, and specific content to attract visitors. This should make up the bulk of your SEO marketing strategy. You can distribute content via multiple channels - your blog, social media accounts, or even email newsletters.

Thoughtful, informative content that provides value to your target market is likely to rank well with search engines and draw customers to your site.

5. Connect the dots

So now you have a brand-new website. Well done! Job (almost) done. What comes next? Connecting the dots...

- Do you already have a Facebook page, Instagram account or Twitter feed? Make sure you add them to your website, and add your website to your social media profiles.
- Are you on LinkedIn? Create a company page and add your details.

- Have you been publishing videos to YouTube? Make sure to embed them into your website, and add your site details to your YouTube channel.

The goal here is to make your brand smashable: to ensure that no matter where people interact with your business, the experience feels the same.

The idea of a smashable brand dates back to 1915 when Coca Cola asked for a bottle that would be recognisable as a Coke bottle even if it was in a hundred pieces. If you removed the logo from your website / Facebook posts / Instagram posts / newsletters / printed materials, would it still be instantly recognisable? Ideally, you want people to have a consistent experience of your brand no matter where they see it.

Building a solid foundation by creating a well-connected, easy-to-use website is the first step to growing your business online. You can do it! One step at a time.



Everything you need to know about web hosting (but never thought to ask)

What is web hosting, why do you need it, and how do you find the right partner to enable your business? All good questions. In essence, [web hosting](#) makes your website accessible to others on the internet. A web hosting provider 'rents out' allocated space on their servers to their customers for a fee. The cost of web hosting depends on your requirements.

Web hosting packages are made up of several features like email accounts, disk space for storing files and the number of visitors allowed (traffic quotas).

Shared hosting

Depending on your business' requirements, you may need only a portion of a server or the entire server. Renting a portion of the server is called shared hosting as you share the entire server with several other customers. Your hosting provider will continuously monitor all the hosting accounts on the server, making sure that no one is abusing the shared hosting space and slowing the other customers' websites down.

If you want every aspect of your web hosting managed for you, including software updates, security patches and networking, then a shared hosting plan is your best choice.

Managed or Self-Managed hosting

If you need a lot of disk space or expect a large amount of traffic, you may want to rent an entire server – this is known as dedicated hosting. With dedicated hosting, you have the option of having the server maintained on your behalf ([Managed Hosting](#)), or you can manage the whole server, the updates and security yourself ([Self-Managed Hosting](#)). In this case, the hosting provider only provides the server and a place in the data centre. You manage all other aspects of the hosting, including which operating system and other software are installed.

How do you find the right web hosting partner?

Scalability is important when choosing a hosting provider and web hosting package. While you may start off small, you'll want to be able to upgrade your hosting package with ease as your business grows. Be wary of any hosting provider who makes upgrading or downgrading between packages unnecessarily complicated or costly.

You want a hosting provider that prides themselves on their customer service, and one that makes themselves available to you 24/7.

The customer support team should be available by phone and email, and should also provide you with [helpful resources](#) to guide you if you prefer to figure things out on your own.

At xneelo, we support our customers as they start and grow their businesses online. Our primary goal is to enable our customers to succeed. We're here to help you as you grow.

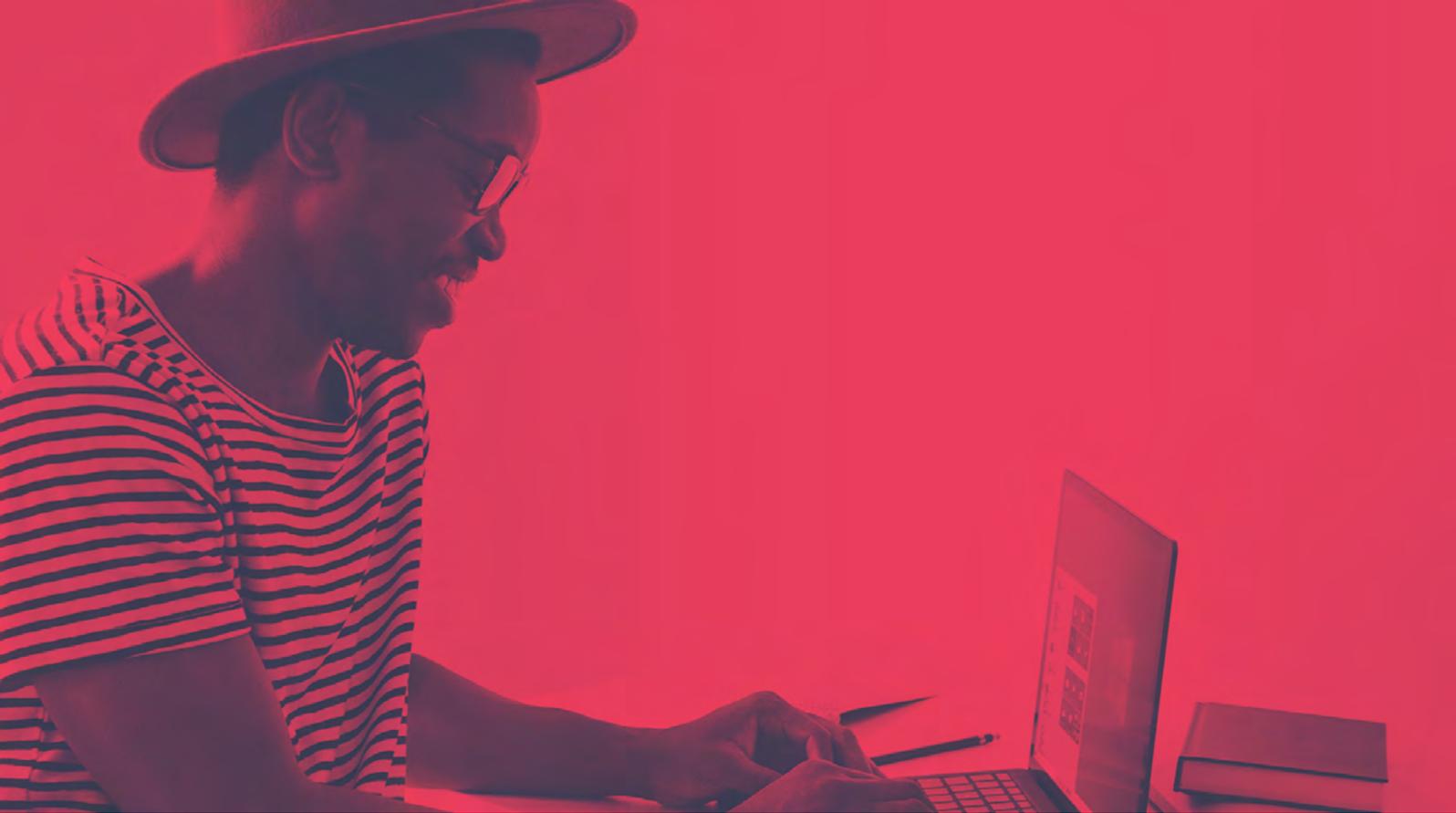


Nkhesani Kapena

Chartered Accountant (ACCA), entrepreneur and
director of [1.2.3. Consulting](#)

“One thing I always say is:

We all have different skills - not everybody is good with numbers, not everybody is creative. If you know that numbers aren't your stronghold, get a great accountant firm or a great accountant. And make sure you're tax compliant!”



Chapter 3

Create content

- Golden rules of content marketing
- Crafting a brilliant content strategy
- Top tip: Zamani Shezi, trucker and e-commerce entrepreneur:
Qalaza Online Store



Golden rules of content marketing

The phrase ‘content marketing’ is thrown around a lot these days. But do you know what it is, and how you should be using it for your small business? There are a few golden rules of content marketing that can make a big difference to your business – we’ve outlined them for you here.

What is content marketing?

Before we dive in, though, let’s take a closer look at what exactly content marketing is. Essentially, content marketing means using your content as a marketing tool.

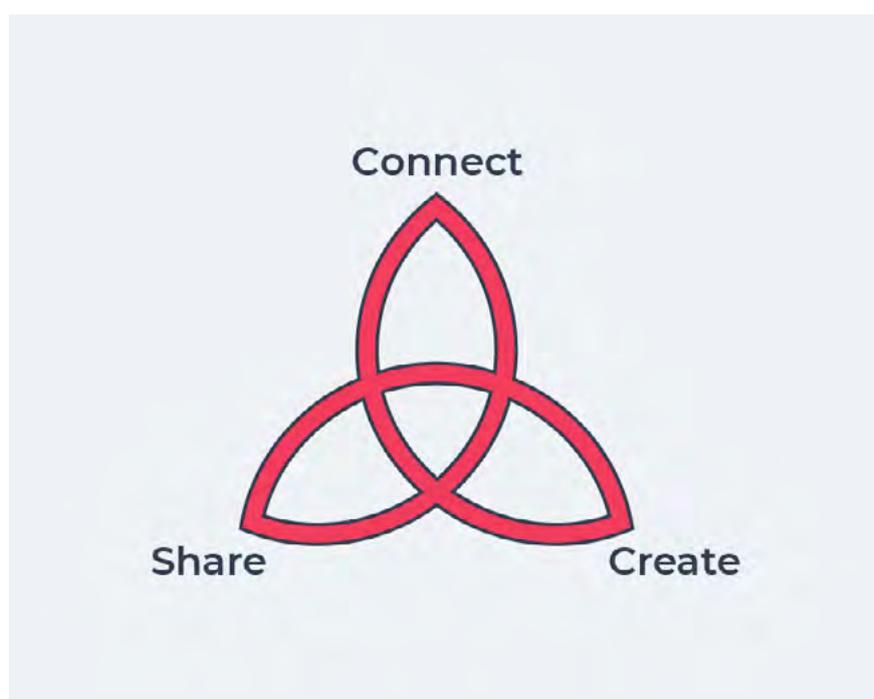
Providing relevant, helpful information to your potential customers – in whatever format you choose – that positions you as an expert.

It's important to be authentic in your content marketing. You're not advertising false claims or promising quick wins: you are authentically sharing your knowledge and expertise to make your customers' lives easier.

The golden rules: connect, create, share

There are three golden rules to content marketing that ensure you're getting the most out of your efforts: connect, create, share.

While you could see content marketing as just another SEO tactic – and there's no doubt that it's very helpful for your SEO – at its core, it's more about connecting to your customers in ways that are authentic and meaningful. Let's take a closer look at each of these rules.



Connect

The first decision you have to make when deciding on a content marketing strategy is where you want to focus your efforts. It takes a lot of time to create meaningful, helpful content that is high quality and relevant – and that’s the only kind of content you want on your site.

There is no point churning out fluff that’s peppered with the right keywords or getting low-cost bulk content to fill up your site. We are all too busy and the internet is already too crowded. You owe it to yourself and your customers to focus your attention where it can be really helpful.

So where are your customers, mostly?

- Do they come to your, and if so would they prefer blog-style articles or videos?
- Do you interact mostly on Facebook? If so, would they prefer content in infographics or lists, or are they likely to click through to a longer-form article?
- If most of your customers are following you on Instagram, you’ll want to tailor your content to be beautiful and keep the links to a minimum, because Instagram is not link-friendly. Engagement via comments can be very high if you’re asking the right questions, though.
- If you’re connecting with potential customers on LinkedIn, you can choose to link to the content on your site or to write LinkedIn articles.

Deciding where to connect to your customers and in what format (writing, video, images, infographics) is an essential first step. Don’t be afraid to ask your customers, too – if you have a newsletter or an active social media account, ask for feedback. This is also a great way to crowd-source ideas for content: you can ask what information people are looking for, or if they have any questions for you. The responses you get can feed into your content marketing plan.

Create

Think about what you're an expert in. What specific information or knowledge would you like to share with your customers? How could you make their lives easier? Once you've zeroed in on your topics, you can create content that will help your customers do their work more effectively.

This will look completely different for every company, and that makes sense. Tap into what makes your customers unique, and what you have to offer them, and focus on that. Think of each piece of content you create as adding to your brand story, writing another chapter in your brand book.

If you've been running your business for a while, you can also think back to the things you wish you'd known in the beginning, and share insights about those aspects of your business.

Think of it as a mentoring path, a way to show that your success was built step-by-step. What seems obvious to you now may be revolutionary for someone who has recently started. And, of course, don't be shy to share the stories of your customers and clients if they have given testimonials.

One caution when it comes to sharing specific knowledge: try to ensure that you're being as inclusive as possible. Not all of your customers will have the same background as you, so if there's anything that might not be obvious, try to link to an FAQ or Glossary section.

Similarly, if you're working mainly with visuals, be sure to include both genders, all races and different ages so that you're not excluding an important part of your customer base.

Share

So now you've crafted your beautiful video, or you've written your series of articles or designed your infographics that explain everything you need to know about your specific niche. Now what? This is the fun part – you get to figure out how to share them with your customers and your future customers.

There are all kinds of options here. Yes, it's a good plan to have them live on your website or social media platforms. Yes, it's a good idea to include them in your newsletter so that your existing customers can upskill themselves. But how else can you disperse your content? How can you broaden your content marketing net?

- You might choose to turn some of your articles into an e-book and offer it as a free download when people sign up for your newsletter.
- You could share it on your social media, or offer a shorter version of an online course as a free masterclass.
- Perhaps you design an infographic that shares all the must-know secrets about a certain topic, and post it to groups interested in that topic on Facebook.

The options are endless, once you have the collateral to work with.

Content marketing might be as simple as starting a blog, or as ambitious as starting a podcast. It might be part of your daily work, or something that you enlist outside help with.

What is important is that you have a clear plan for what content you want to share, and that you know exactly where – and how – to share it. With the right plan, content marketing can be just one more way to empower your small business to great success. That's what we're rooting for.



Crafting a brilliant content strategy

Your website is up and running, you've found the right hosting partner, and now... What, exactly? You may have heard people talking about 'content strategy'... But what exactly is it? And how (and why) do you create one for your business?

Decide which gap you're filling

The first step in creating your content strategy is deciding which questions you're answering. The visitors to your site have a specific set of questions or are trying to solve a particular problem. What is this gap, and why are you uniquely placed to fill it?

To answer these questions effectively, you need to have a deep understanding of who your customers are.

It can be helpful to create a persona of a typical customer:

- How old are they?
- Are they male or female?
- Where do they live?
- What kind of work do they do?
- How do they access the internet?
- Why do they need the product or service you offer?

You may have a few different types of customers, in which case you'll create a few different personas. Give them made-up names, and then you can reference them when you're making content decisions. "Would Sarah understand this lingo? Does Thomas need more detail here?"

Choose what type of content to produce

Now that you know what you want to share, and who you want to share it with, it's time to decide what format the content will be in.

- Are you going to be writing articles (long or short)?
- Are you going to create videos?
- Are you going to drive your content through social media, and if so, which platforms?
- Are you going to focus on stories (for Facebook, Instagram and Google)?
- Do you think a newsletter would work best?

There are so many different kinds of content available online today, and knowing which ones your customers will respond to will influence your content strategy. If you're not sure, you can always test out a few different options and see which one has the most engagement.

Plan out your content

Once you've decided on the format, it's time to think about the frequency, and plan a content calendar. Consistency is essential: your customers will come to recognise that you are offering advice or guidance on a certain topic at a certain time, and the goal is to become their go-to for this specific kind of information. If you post sporadically, this is less likely to happen.

It can help to choose specific themes for each month (within your broader content themes) and then break those themes down into questions that you answer each week. Ideally, you want to know ahead of time exactly what your [content calendar](#) looks like for the next three months.

Distribute it through your channels

Now that you have a consistent posting schedule, be sure you're distributing it as far and wide as possible. The three rules of content marketing are: connect, create, share. There's no point in creating the ideal content if you're not able to share it effectively. This could be your website, social media, newsletter, WhatsApp or any other ways you have to connect to your customers.

A content strategy takes your brand story, combines it with content marketing, and produces something truly helpful for your customers. Think of it as a guide that ensures you're answering all the necessary questions in a way that builds your brand.

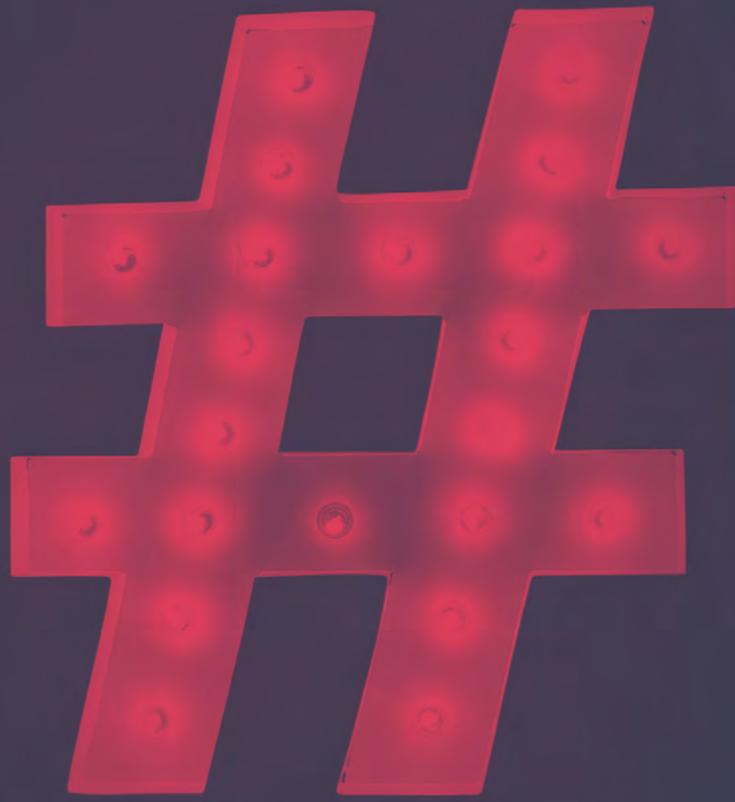


Zamani Shezi

Trucker and e-commerce entrepreneur:
[Qalaza Online Store](#)

“My advice to any beginner interested in joining the e-commerce world would be to start small and build.

Pay yourself first by investing in education, especially if you are a technophobic person like I was. I managed to get the correct answers to the idea I had to convert my hustling techniques to a scalable business model.”



Chapter 4

Share your content

- A simple SEO strategy
- How to choose the right social media platforms for your business
- Top tip: Aisha Pandor, CEO and co-founder of SweepSouth



A simple SEO strategy

SEO can seem like a foreign language if you don't understand it. But as a small business owner, it's a language you need to learn.

Search engine optimisation, or SEO, is the process of improving your website so that search engines, like Google, can find your content and display it as a suggested search result to the right audience.

The goal? To make it easier for prospective customers to find you - and choose to use you.

SEO takes time

Ranking as a top result in Google doesn't happen overnight. You need an SEO strategy. First, identify the keywords or phrases that your target market uses when searching for your product or service. Once you know what these are, you need to optimise your content so that it ranks well for those searches.

Be careful not to overload your content with keywords just for the sake of it - you want to optimise your content for your readers first, search engines second.

SEO is essential whether you're already established or a new start-up because it generates traffic to your website. An increase in traffic to your website helps with conversions, which helps with profit. Win-win!

Now that you know what SEO is, and why it's important, here are a few tips to get started.

1. Focus on technical SEO

Technical SEO is the process of optimising your website so that it's easy for search engine 'crawlers' (the little bots) to read and index your website. They do this constantly, noting website changes or broken links, like a 404 (page not found) error. Ideally, you want this process to be quick and simple for the crawler.

Even if your content is the best out there, technical issues can affect how it is found and indexed. Security is also important - make sure your hosting provider offers SSL/TLS certificates.

There are some things you can do even if you don't have a technical background, like:

- Use a plugin like Yoast to create a sitemap and submit it to Google.
- Fix any performance issues. A slow-loading website will affect your website's chances of performing well in search engines. Ensure you're using a reputable [web hosting](#) provider and, if you're using WordPress, consider performance improving plugins.
- Make sure your website works across various devices and screen sizes. Websites that are not mobile-friendly will not be ranked highly.
- Fix any old or broken links - search engines will downgrade your content if you send your readers to too many dead ends.
- Optimise your images - they should be relevant and appropriately captioned.

2. Focus on local SEO

Almost a third of mobile searches are location-based. Even if your potential customers don't specify their location, Google automatically prioritises results according to location.

Here's how you can make the most of this opportunity:

- Include information on your site that shows you operate locally, such as your physical address, location-specific keywords etc.
- Create a Google My Business profile to give your business an extra presence on the search results page.
- Add your website to local listing sites.
- Use Structured Data like reviews and events, where applicable.

3. Prioritise content creation

The best way to write content for new prospective customers is to know what they're already searching for. If you're not sure, there are plenty of tools you can use to define the keywords that relate to your business.

But your content is not just for SEO - it has to be genuinely engaging and interesting to your audience. Your content should incorporate target keywords organically - don't force the use of keywords by compromising your content. The structure is important too: make sure your content is easily readable by using page titles and headlines.

While content marketing does take time and effort, it's a vital tool in engaging your website visitors.

4. Leverage social media

This goes hand in hand with your content creation strategy. Use your social media channels to distribute your content widely. By sharing your content this way, you're increasing your content exposure.

When you write helpful, relevant content, your readers are also more likely to share it on their networks. This authentic social proof is priceless.

5. Use backlinks

A backlink is when another website posts a link to your website in their content. When other sites refer their visitors to your website, it improves your position in search engines. Quality backlinks mean your content is worth reading. While this may happen organically, you can also implement an outreach strategy where you reach out to your contacts and request that they incorporate a relevant link to your content. In essence, remember that while SEO is for search engines, your website content is for real people. Make sure your content is optimised for them first.



How to choose the right social media platforms for your business

Now that your website is full of helpful content, you're probably ready to venture into the world of social media! But where to start? Your social media marketing should go hand in hand with your content strategy and all your other marketing efforts. By harnessing the right social media platforms, you can distribute your content widely – increasing your brand awareness and, hopefully, your sales too.

The most popular social media channels at the moment are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and Pinterest. While it's possible to have a presence on each of them, it's better to master one or two at a time.

What to consider

Some of the things to think about when choosing which social media platform to focus on:

- What are your specific social media goals?
- Which platforms are your customers using?
- Which platforms are you comfortable using, or do your team members have expertise in?
- Which platforms are your competitors using? If you're not sure, do a quick competitor review to find out what's working for them.
- Which platform is best suited for the type of content you intend to post? If you have a lot of great images, consider using a platform like Instagram or Pinterest. If your content isn't as visually strong, consider another platform like Twitter or Facebook.

How do you know if your efforts are working? Traffic and conversions measure the success of your social media – you'll need to set realistic social media marketing goals and measure them regularly. You can measure how much web traffic comes from each platform - if one platform is performing better than the others, you can double down on that one.

Know who your audience is

To create meaningful content on social media, it's essential to identify your audience – the more specific you are, the easier it will be to narrow your focus. Here are some guiding questions to help you get started:

- **Who** are your customers?
- **What** are their specific characteristics? Things like their age, gender, etc.
- What **devices** do they use to access your website? (You can get this information quite simply from Google Analytics.)
- Other than your product or service, what else are your potential customers' **interested in**?

The answers to these questions will help you create a general profile of your customer base.

Explore the platforms your customers use

Now that you know who you're targeting, and what you'd like to achieve by using social media, you need to determine which platforms are best suited to your business. Your customers may be on multiple platforms but this doesn't mean you need to be on all of them as well.

Rather focus your attention on one or two platforms, and do them well. Focusing your social media efforts will guarantee a better return on your investment.

Unless you work on it full time, it's not possible to be present on all of the available social media platforms without compromising on the quality of your content. Also, remember that there's a difference between presence and engagement. Engagement means how much your customers interact with the content you're sharing: the number of page likes, comments and shares. Your customers may be on Facebook, but they may interact more (and be driven to make purchases) via Instagram, for example.

Social media success relies on testing and iterating. Adjust your posting schedule and content once you see when your customers are most engaged – Google Analytics can help you uncover when your site is the busiest, and you'll be able to get insights on post performance from each social media platform.

Remember: if you want to drive sales, make sure your customers land on your product page or sign up page. Make their journey as seamless as possible.

Understand where your content fits best

Your specific content won't be suitable for every platform. Here's a quick cheat sheet of what content fits best on each platform.



Facebook

- With over 2.45 billion users, it's no surprise that Facebook remains at the top of the list of social media platforms.
- Facebook is great for developing your brand identity, broadening your reach, creating a community and keeping customers informed of changes.



Twitter

- Twitter is a popular choice for many businesses and is popular among readers who want to keep up with the world but don't want to read long-form content.
- Twitter uses hashtags (organising content according to a certain word or phrase), making this platform ideal for real-time updates and promoting events.



Instagram

- Instagram is dependent on appealing, good-quality imagery.
- Instagram promises 'less noise' than Facebook and relies on imagery for lead generation (sales). By adding buttons to your posts,

or using the 'swipe up' feature in your stories, you can easily take your customers from viewing your products to purchasing them.

- Consider using Instagram for lead generation, creating a community, expanding your reach or affirming your brand identity.



LinkedIn

- LinkedIn is ideal for creating a professional business network community.
- Having a LinkedIn profile helps build business credibility and is a valuable marketing tool to have at your disposal.
- LinkedIn enables you to interact with like-minded professionals and other industry experts.
- Due to the unique focus of LinkedIn, this platform is best used for business-to-business (B2B) lead generation, recruiting and networking.



YouTube

- YouTube is considered the second most popular search engine after Google.
- 1 billion people visit YouTube each month globally, with 100 hours of video uploaded every 60 seconds. That's a lot of traffic you can reach.
- By 2022, online video will make up more than [82% of all consumer internet traffic](#), so this is a trend to get involved in now. Viewers of your content have the option to share your videos on their social media platforms. They can also comment on your videos, making it a valuable way to connect with your (potential) customers.



Pinterest

- More than [47% of Pinterest users](#) log on specifically to make a purchase.
- As Pinterest is entirely visual, you'll need high-quality imagery to get the best results from this platform.
- Pinterest is predominantly used by women, so if your business is female-focused, this channel could be an ideal platform for you.

No matter the platform you choose, every small business needs a social media presence of some description. But before you dive into social media, it's important to understand where your potential customers already are and join them on those platforms. Choose one or two of the best-suited platforms for your business, and focus on doing them well.

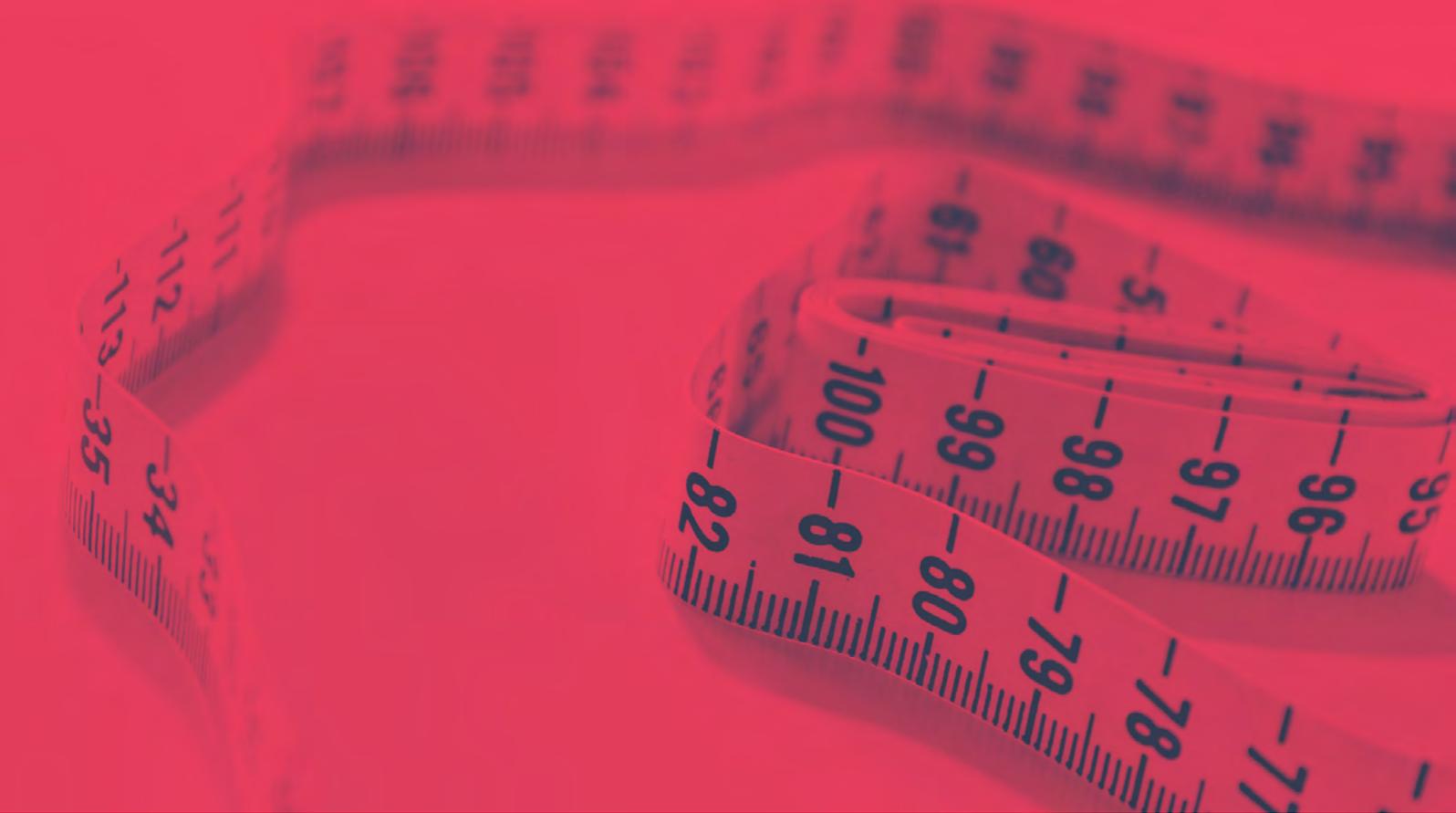


Aisha Pandor

CEO and co-founder of [SweepSouth](#)

“One of the pitfalls that is just waiting for entrepreneurs who want to build platform businesses is the danger of losing focus.

You start something, you build it, it's quite simple: you're going to offer a product or a service through your tech platform to customers. And then all these other shiny avenues start to show themselves. The danger of that happening early on is that you start to lose focus on the initial core: the thing that's driving all the initial connections. That can result in certain death if you're not careful.”



Chapter 5

Expand your reach

- Let's grow your business online
- Traffic report: understanding paid vs organic traffic
- Top tip: Theo Baloyi, founder of Bathu shoes and one of South Africa's Top 5 Most Exciting Startups 2020



Let's grow your business online

Whether you've just started a business, moved your business online, or need to give your online presence a boost, we know that it can seem a little overwhelming. Running a business is no easy feat - it takes courage, perseverance and resources. Here are a few tips to help you grow.

1. Set yourself up for success

Define your brand story

Conventional branding includes your logo, business cards and your storefront or office branding.

Now that you're taking your business online, the most important element of your brand is your website. Visitors need to know, as soon as they land on your website, what you're offering them and why they should choose you.

Customers are inundated with product and service offerings - you need to cut through all the online 'noise'. How do you do that? By standing out from the crowd. Think of some of your favourite brands - what sets them apart? The answer probably lies in their brand story - a short (but to the point) one-liner that tells their customers what makes them special.

What's your brand story?

- One element of your brand story will focus on your products and services - why you chose to start this particular business. Your founding story.
- The other element should focus on what sets you apart - what are your unique selling points and how do they differ from your competitors?

Choose a trustworthy web host

When taking your business online, you might not initially consider the importance of choosing a reliable web hosting provider. But it's an extremely important step in your online journey: a reliable web host will support you as you grow.

In a nutshell, web hosting is your website's home on the internet. Web hosting providers 'rent out' allocated space on their servers to their customers for a fee. But not all web hosting providers are the same, so you'll need to take some time to consider your business needs and your hosting non-negotiables.

Think about the level of customer service and support you need - make sure the hosting provider you choose is always available to assist you, 24/7. And that they can offer the help you need for your business to succeed.

Another important feature is scalability. While your business may start small, you'll want your hosting provider to be able to grow - and scale - as you do. Make sure you're able to upgrade - or downgrade - your package with ease and at no additional cost.

Lastly, no matter the package you choose, you want a hosting provider that prides themselves on their customer service. Customer reviews are a great way to see what their current customers think of their service - have a read through [HelloPeter](#) and [Google reviews](#) before making your final decision.

Promote your website

If your marketing budget is quite small, you might not think you have many options to promote your website. Luckily, there are plenty of ways you can promote your business online without breaking the bank. Here are some of them:

- **Reach out to bloggers or influencers**

Ensure they share the same audience and interests as you. Send these influencers free samples of your products or offer them a free trial of your service to review. Customers tend to trust real reviews over sponsored posts.

- **Create quality content**

Then share it on your blog. Blogging is probably the best low-cost method of promotion as it's easy to scale as your business does. It's also fairly easy to start a blog (if you use a platform like WordPress). Start by publishing one blog post a week and then ramp it up as you're able. But remember, with content, consistency is key.

- **Improve your SEO**

High-quality content with SEO (search engine optimisation) helps

search engines (like Google) find your website. This means that other people searching the web are more likely to find your website as well. One way to improve your SEO is by publishing high-quality content. SEO traffic (visitors to your website because of SEO) is free of charge.

Use Google's tools

The suite of Google tools that are available to small businesses are mostly free - and very powerful.

Google My Business

One of the most valuable tools you can have in your business toolbox is [Google My Business](#) - a free business listing tool. When customers search for your business on Google Search or Google Maps, it will appear in the search results along with your location, contact details and any other relevant information.

This is the ideal platform to promote your services, physical address, opening hours, photos and customer reviews – free of charge.

Once it's set up, don't forget to ask your customers to review your products and services. This isn't the only valuable tool Google provides for small businesses, you can find out more on their Google for Small Business platform.

Google Ads

When used correctly, [Google Ads](#) provides huge reach and potential sales for your business. The two most popular choices of advertising on Google Ads are search ads (ads that show in response to search queries on Google) and display ads (banner ads displayed on websites).

What makes Google Ads even more attractive is the fact that you're able to monitor and measure where every rand goes. That way, if a campaign isn't working, you can adjust your spend or even pause the campaign while you make improvements to your selling proposition. No long term commitments!

It's a good idea to try a few different campaigns to see what works best for your business. When you find that 'sweet spot', you can increase your spend on it.

Google Analytics

[Google Analytics](#) is a free tool but there is also a paid-for version that includes more in-depth functionality. Google Analytics helps you track visitors to your site and understand their behaviour - which pages they landed on, the time they spent on those pages and any other actions they took while browsing your site.

Once you understand how your visitors interact with your website, you can optimise it to perform better.

By tracking where your visitors dropped off, you'll know where to fix any issues they may be experiencing in the user journey. You can find out where your visitors came from and tailor your products and services to match them more effectively. You can also check [Google Search Console](#) which provides insight into how your website is performing.

2. Make sure you're visible online

If your customers can't find you, they can't buy from you or use your services.

One of the many important tasks you face as a small business owner is making sure your website is immediately visible so that customers can easily find you. The best way to do this is by deep diving into SEO.

Be SEO savvy

On-site or technical SEO is all about optimising your content. This means using keywords in your posts, titles, headings, and URLs.

You should also pay attention to technical aspects of your website that impact your search engine rankings, like page loading speed. Make sure your website stays fast by regularly testing it - you can use [PageSpeed Insights](#) or [WebPageTest.org](#). It's also important that your site is mobile-friendly, so make sure to implement responsive design.

Craft content for your customers

Thoughtful, informative content that provides value to your target market has a strong chance of ranking well with search engines and drawing customers to your site.

Implement off-site SEO

Think of off-site SEO as a spiderweb with your website in the middle of it. Off-site strategies include:

- **Link building:** Find and promote links across the web that lead back to your site.
- **Guest posts:** Writing posts for other websites' blogs.
- **Social media:** Promoting your business and website on various social networks.

These practices point users from around the web towards your website, to generate more traffic. Links to your content from other high-quality sites can go a long way towards boosting your visibility and even improving your search engine rankings.

3. Master social media

Now that you're online, you need to be on social media (if you aren't already!) - here are our top tips.

Choose the right channel

Before deciding on your social media handles, you should decide which social media channels are right for you and your business goals. Whether you're looking to increase your brand awareness, generate sales leads or just create an online presence, not every social media platform will be right for you.

If you're not sure where to start you can use your competitors as a gauge. Which channels are they using and how? What is the interaction with the community like on these channels? If you know where your audience is, you know where to start!

There are a number of reports that can help you to better understand the key demographics of each of the social media channels. It's always advisable to back up any strategic decision, like your online presence, with actual data.

Visuals, community or leads

In short, if you're using Instagram, make sure you have great quality visuals. For greater community reach, try Facebook, and for generating business leads and connections, use LinkedIn.

Also, don't forget the second most popular social media platform - YouTube. Gone are the days when YouTube was only used to stream videos. If you create your own YouTube channel, it can be used as a powerful platform to promote your business. You can create and share helpful videos on your channel. You can even embed these videos on your website and your other social media platforms.

There's never been a better time to grow your business online. With the right tools, this process doesn't need to be as daunting as it was in the past. Starting a business is the hardest part - we're here to help you as you grow.



Traffic report: understanding paid vs organic traffic

Traffic: the one thing every website owner wants (and the one thing every driver doesn't want). When you're trying to get traffic to your website, what's the best route to follow - paid? Organic? Or a combination of the two?

Paid vs organic

The truth is that paid and organic traffic go hand in hand, they support each other. Paid traffic is any visitor who comes to your website because you advertised to them: this can include Google ads, Facebook ads, Instagram or YouTube ads... You get the idea.

Organic traffic is the opposite: visitors who found you organically by searching for a product or service similar to what you offer and choosing your website from the search results.

Paid traffic

While paid traffic is a good way to fill in the gap where your organic traffic isn't performing, it can't be your only technique to get visitors to your website.

Paid traffic is immediate: as soon as your ads start running, you'll see traffic. It's also more manageable because you can target your visitors very carefully. But it's expensive - you are literally paying for every person who visits your website.

Organic traffic

Organic traffic, on the other hand, is more of a slow-burn project. You need to carefully craft content that answers the questions your visitors are asking (that's content marketing). You need to work on your SEO, and ensure your site structure makes sense and that people can seamlessly move through your website sales funnel.

While this might sound like a lot of work, these are all time investments that will reap big rewards in the future: they are absolutely worth spending time on because they improve the experience for your visitors (and potential customers).

Does paid advertising work for everyone?

Yes, it does - with a caveat: you need to make sure you're doing it right. It can get very expensive depending on what market you're operating in, and if you don't understand what you're doing, you can spend a lot of money targeting the wrong people.

But in short, paying for more eyeballs on your website is almost always a good idea.

The question, then, is where to start. Google ads, Facebook ads, Instagram, LinkedIn? That depends on your marketing requirements, and where your audience is spending their time. There is no wrong or right place to get started.

If you're selling beautiful vintage clothing, Instagram would be an obvious fit. Business coaching services would live more naturally on LinkedIn, while local pet grooming or products could be either Facebook (targeting local neighbourhood groups) or Google (targeting specific searches).

Does paid advertising guarantee traffic?

Paid advertising is not a golden bullet, unfortunately. If your ads aren't optimised or targeted correctly, or if you're underspending, then your ads won't be shown to the right people (or in the necessary volume) and you won't get as much traffic as you could. Remember, too, that even if paid advertising improves traffic, it may not result in sales. You're not guaranteed to bring in the right audience. That's why it's so important to measure the quality of the traffic you're bringing to your website, by tracking conversion rates.

Building a thriving online business is a long process. It's not something you can magically fix by throwing some budget at paid advertising, but that doesn't mean paid traffic isn't worth investing in.

With the right balance of organic and paid traffic, you'll be able to see the results of all your hard work paying off.



Theo Baloyi

Founder of Bathu shoes and one of South Africa's Top 5 Most Exciting Startups 2020

**“Show up and be present,
7 days a week.**

- Show up to your dreams
- Show up to serving
- Show up to commitments
- Show up to purpose
- Show up to work
- Show up to projects
- Show up to meetings.”



Chapter 6

Connect the dots

- How to connect with your customers
- To Do List: Get your business listed
- Top tip: Bronwyn Williams, futurist, trend translator and economist at Flux Trends



How to connect with your customers

How good are you at connecting with your customers? How easy is it for them to connect with you? Here are a few questions to ask yourself to ensure you're making it as easy as possible for customers to make the connection.

Social media

This one has to be top of the list because it is such a big part of our everyday lives. Whether it's Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn or YouTube, social media is a really direct way to connect to customers. Have you got a social media presence for your small business, and if so, are you engaging with customers on it?

‘Engaging’ doesn’t just mean putting up posts with links to your articles, but asking questions, responding to comments and looking at the likes and shares various posts receive so that you know how to tailor your content to meet your customers’ needs.

Email marketing

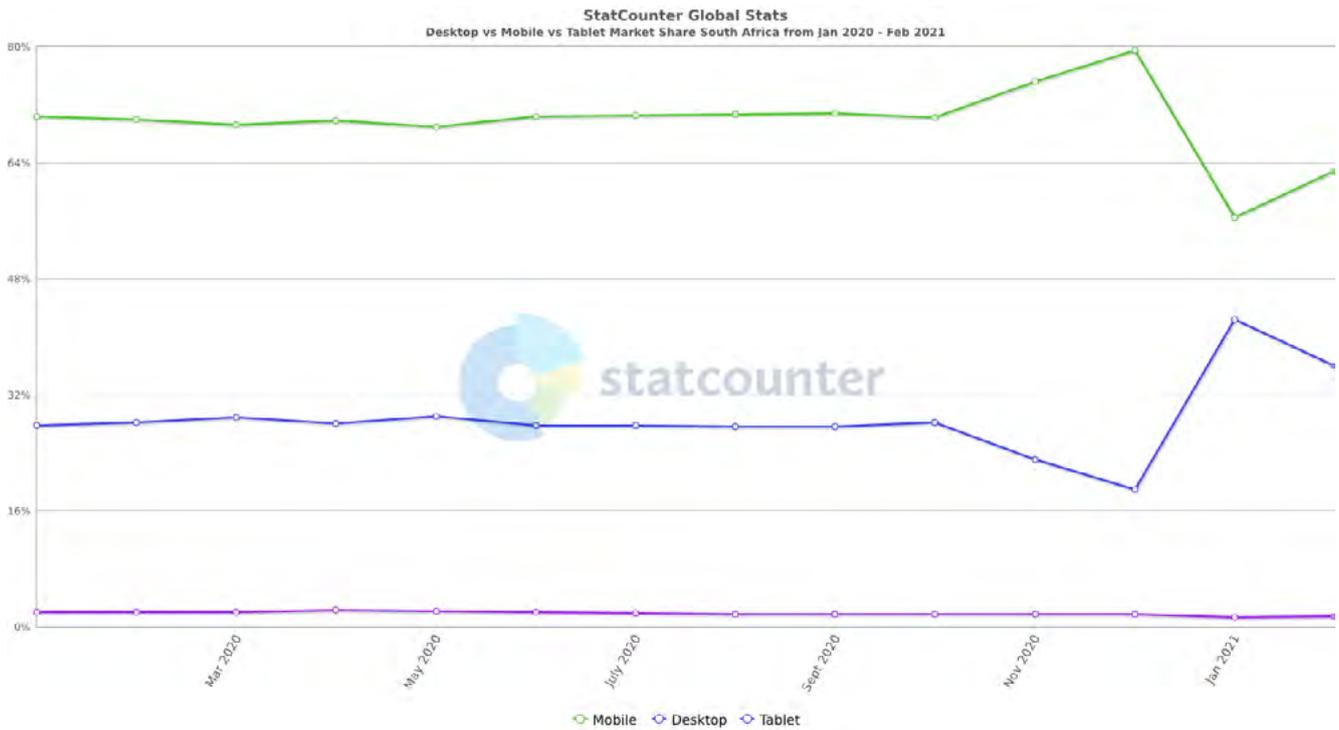
It’s true that none of us need more unnecessary emails – but we do need emails that make our lives simpler. The internet is full of so much information that anything that helps us cut through the clutter is helpful. How could your email marketing do that?

There are a few things to keep in mind when setting up an email newsletter. Ask yourself these questions:

- What does my email offer that my customers can’t get elsewhere?
- Can I make the messaging clearer and more succinct?
- Is it mobile friendly?

The last thing you want is for your email to look strange on mobile – or, for that matter, for your website not to be mobile-friendly.

[The latest stats show](#) that in South Africa more than 75% of traffic is on mobile devices.



Source: [StatCounter Global Stats – Platform Comparison Market Share](#)

Videos

Depending on your business, creating videos for YouTube or Facebook may be an excellent way to connect.

If you have knowledge that could help your customers – tutorials, webinars, DIY videos or explainers – you can create short videos to upload onto YouTube or Facebook.

This approach is helpful for businesses that offer a service or sell a product that may be complicated to understand.

If you prefer a more dynamic approach, you can also do Facebook Live or Instagram Live videos, where you invite customers into your space for a few minutes. These kinds of videos work well for restaurants, venues or small businesses that create their products on site. Everyone loves a behind-the-scenes peek! You can also offer webinars to explain certain niche aspects of your business that could help your customers do their work more effectively.

Ask yourself: how could I use video to make my business more appealing?

Podcast

Did you know that podcasts are now given featured search results from Google and that in the next year podcast transcripts will be indexed by Google? Google Podcasts lets you “find and listen to the world’s podcasts for free.”

What that means for SEO is that if you have a podcast, you are automatically going to be showing up in search results that you couldn’t access otherwise.

However you choose to connect with your customers, remember that authenticity is essential in any exchange. We are all too busy and our inboxes are all too full. Make sure your contact is worth spending time on.



To Do List: Get your business listed

Okay! You've almost made it to the end of this guide. Now is the time to take a step back, look at all your marketing efforts, examine your content strategy, and see if there are any gaps you could easily fill. One of those might be business listings. Is your business listed on all the relevant platforms? Are you collecting reviews in all the places you could be?

Here's a quick checklist - with one caveat.

This isn't a 'set and forget' process: if you're gathering feedback online, you need to monitor it, respond to any feedback (positive or negative) and be engaged in the process. If that seems like too much work to maintain, just choose one platform to start with.

Google My Business

[Google My Business](#) is a business listing on Google that lets you connect with potential customers. This free service includes Google Search and Google Maps, so if you have a physical store it's a no-brainer: your customers will be able to find you on the map, along with store opening hours, your contact details and photos of your products. But even if your business is purely online it's helpful to have a Google My Business listing: you can choose not to show your address but list the areas you serve.

Anything that makes it easier for potential customers to find you online is helpful.

Google Reviews

[Reviews](#) on Google appear next to your company listing and can be a valuable way to build trust with new customers. You can ask your current customers to leave a review and a rating on Google reviews, and respond to the reviews once your business has been verified (a process that currently involves Google sending a postcard to your mailing address, which can take 22 days.)

Facebook Reviews

Facebook reviews are another excellent way to build trust with future customers. If someone compliments you on your service or product, ask them to leave you a review on Facebook.

As you collect reviews and ratings, your business page will display a star rating out of five stars - an authentic way of knowing if you are meeting the standards you aim for.

HelloPeter

One of South Africa's top review sites, [HelloPeter](#) lets people "learn from other people's experiences and make smarter choices". It's a great place for people to give authentic reviews of your service, and for you to respond. Again, because it's other people talking about your business, it holds real weight with potential customers.

LinkedIn

And finally, make sure your business has a LinkedIn page. There are two main reasons for this: the first is so that your employees can be linked to your company (and not another one with a similar name). Every time anyone who works for your company connects with someone new, they are invited to follow the company page - it's an easy win.

Having a LinkedIn page also lets customers talk about the good service they received or the excellent products you create, and tag you so that others know who to contact if they're interested in something similar.

And it's another platform to share the content you create, the services you offer, or the products you sell.

It can be hard to be on top of every aspect of running a small business. At [xneelo](#), we aim to empower businesses to be as effective as possible, while ensuring their web hosting is one less thing to think about.



Bronwyn Williams

futurist, trend translator and economist at [Flux Trends](#)

“As entrepreneurs, there’s not been a better time to start a business in a long time. Fortunes are made in downturns, this is something we know from history. Because if you can succeed in tough times, you know you’re going to be able to flourish as times get better and times definitely will.

The other thing that’s encouraging from an entrepreneurial perspective is that all businesses solve a problem, and the more problems there are lying around, the more business opportunities there are. I think there are a lot of opportunities for small businesses to solve real problems at the moment.”

See you soon!

Well done! You made it to the end of the guide to getting your business online. We hope you feel empowered and excited to continue your online journey.

At xneelo, our goal is to enable our customers to grow their businesses online - that's what we're here for. And that's why we partnered with Heavy Chef, South Africa's top entrepreneur education platform. Connect with us for ongoing support in your entrepreneurial journey - we're here to walk every step of the way with you.

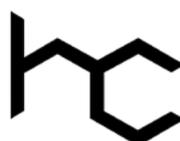
Looking forward to seeing you online!

Your xneelo team



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